

FACT SHEET | Railway Safety

2015 Budget for a Better Minnesota

Every day, trains carrying oil and other hazardous materials pass through Minnesota. These trains present real risks to public safety and our natural resources. That is why Governor Mark Dayton is focused on improving railway safety in Minnesota. Seventy-five railway safety improvement projects, at Minnesota's most dangerous and congested rail crossings, would be completed statewide if a proposal from Governor Dayton is passed this session. Investing in these essential infrastructure projects, and providing for additional disaster preparedness and training, would help significantly enhance the safety of Minnesotans living near railroads statewide.

Governor Dayton's Railway Safety Proposal

Governor Dayton's railway safety plan would invest \$330 million over the next ten years in safer railroad crossings, and provide additional bonding dollars to fund four major grade separations in Coon Rapids, Moorhead, Prairie Island, and Willmar. The proposal would implement new quiet zones in communities located along busy rail lines, provide better training for emergency managers and first responders, and hire a new Rail Office Director who would help position the state to play a larger role in addressing freight rail service and safety issues throughout Minnesota.

The Governor developed his railway safety proposal after [holding seven railway safety meetings](#) across Minnesota, [hosting a railway safety summit](#) last fall, and [conducting a statewide survey](#) gathering the input of local community leaders. His recommendations are based on the input of Minnesotans, emergency managers and first responders, and experts at the Minnesota Department of Transportation.

- **Four Major Grade Separations** – When the Governor introduces his bonding proposal later this month, it will include funding for four major grade separations in Coon Rapids, Moorhead, Prairie Island, and Willmar. Improvements at these rail crossings, which are heavily congested and considered particularly dangerous, are urgently needed and require major investments.
- **Another 71 Infrastructure Improvements Statewide** – The Governor's proposal also would fund [71 additional railway safety improvements](#) at rail crossings across Minnesota. A comprehensive list of these projects, which were chosen by MnDOT experts based on their levels of danger and congestion. A comprehensive list of those projects is available online.
- **Better Training for First Responders** – In order to adequately prepare for potential derailments or railway disasters, the Governor's proposal would fund additional training measures for first responders and emergency managers across Minnesota. Specifically, this would include the construction of a new multifaceted training facility at Camp Ripley, which would simulate response scenarios related to the transportation and storage of hazardous materials, including Bakken oil.
- **More Quiet Zones** – The Governor's proposal also would provide funding to help establish new quiet zones in communities located along busy rail lines.
- **A New Rail Office Director** – The proposal would hire a new Rail Office Director who would position Minnesota to play a larger role in addressing freight rail service and safety issues in the state. This would allow accelerated and expanded delivery of grade crossing safety improvements, expanded rail safety inspection, and enforcement of rail safety regulations and rail planning.

How the Proposal is Funded

The Governor's proposed railway safety improvements would be funded through the following measures:

- **Assessments on Class I Railroads** – The proposal would implement a \$33 million annual assessment on the four Class I railroads that operate in Minnesota, based on their track mileage. It would be used to fund additional grade separations and crossing improvements across Minnesota.

- **State General Obligation Bonds** – The Governor’s bonding bill will include funding for four major grade separation projects in Coon Rapids, Moorhead, Prairie Island, and Willmar. It also will include funding for a new railway safety training facility for first responders at Camp Ripley and funding for quiet zones.

Increased Rail Traffic Poses New Safety Risks

- **Extensive Rail Network** – Minnesota has 4,444 rail route miles used by twenty different railroads, which annually move more than one trillion tons of freight through the state. Minnesota’s share of rail transportation exceeds the U.S. average by almost 30 percent. By 2030, rail traffic in Minnesota is projected to grow 25 percent to 40 percent.
- **Strained Track Capacity** – On Minnesota’s most highly traveled routes, more than 100 trains pass through Minnesota communities each day. Increasing oil train traffic from North Dakota has reduced rail line capacity for Minnesota businesses and led to long backups in our communities, while motorists wait for trains to pass.
- **700 Miles at Risk** – A 2014 MnDOT study found that oil trains use more than 700 miles of train routes in the state to carry North Dakota crude oil to refineries on the East and Gulf Coasts. These routes travel through the heart of some of Minnesota’s most populous communities, and pass over 683 crossings throughout the state. Each of these crossings increases the chance of a train/motor vehicle accident, while putting the Minnesotans who must travel across the tracks at risk.
- **Deadly Accidents** – Oil train disasters have proven to be deadly. In December 2013, an oil train in Casselton, North Dakota exploded – forcing 1,400 residents to evacuate from the area. And in July 2013, an oil train from North Dakota derailed and exploded in Quebec, Canada – killing 42 people and destroying 30 buildings.

Modernizing Property Taxes Paid by Railroads

- **Update Assessment Methods and Expand the Taxable Property of Railroads** – Minnesota’s current railroad property tax laws have not kept pace with modern assessment practices. The proposal expands the taxable property of railroads to include rolling stock, rail cars, trestles, and rail bridges. Property tax modernization would provide \$45 million in new annual revenues for cities, counties, townships, and others. [A comprehensive list](#) of how much new funding local governments would receive under the Governor’s plan is available online.

Building on Recent Progress

These needed improvements would build on [new railway safety measures implemented last year](#) by Governor Dayton and the Minnesota Legislature. Those efforts required railroad companies to submit disaster prevention and emergency plans to the State, increased the number of rail inspectors at MnDOT, required railroads to respond to derailments or spills of hazardous cargos within a specified timeframe, and provided additional emergency response training for local police and fire departments, and other first responders in Minnesota.